

# John Boehner suggests leaving immigration out of 2015 budget talks

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Hoping to prevent a government shutdown by opponents of President Obama's immigration plan, House Speaker John A. Boehner floated a proposal Tuesday for funding most of the government — but not the immigration agencies — through the end of the 2015 fiscal year.

The Republican leader said the plan remained a work in progress as leaders tried to round up support. It would fund the immigration agencies only until early next year, when Republicans believe they will have greater leverage to fight the president.

Immigration reform supporters Donnita Moody, Lorena Mejia and Miguel Solis-Mena, from left, applaud members of Congress speaking in support of President Obama's executive action. (Manuel Balce Ceneta / Associated Press)



To sweeten the deal for Republican hard-liners, a separate measure condemning Obama's go-it-alone executive action on immigration would be voted on in the House as early as this week. But that bill would be largely symbolic since the Democratic-controlled Senate would probably ignore it.

In many ways, Boehner's move is the opening salvo in what is expected to be a long-running legislative fight to undo the president's immigration executive action, which would protect up to 5 million immigrants — mostly parents of U.S. citizens.

A government shutdown or prolonged budget battle over immigration is something Republican leaders want to avoid after the party takes control of both houses of Congress in January. They would prefer to focus on the GOP's broader agenda to scale back parts of the Affordable Care Act, cut taxes and bolster trade policy.

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On immigration, Boehner and other Republican leaders say they will instead fight the president in the courts or attempt to rally public opinion against the plan, as was seen in Tuesday's grilling of Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson at a House Homeland Security Committee hearing.

But some conservatives are demanding a stronger response. A few want to use the upcoming Dec. 11 deadline to pass a new government appropriations bills as leverage, which could provoke a shutdown. Party leaders say another government shutdown should be off the table, because they fear Republicans would be blamed by voters for such a move.

Whether Boehner can hold his troops to keep the government running remains to be seen. After emerging from a closed-door meeting with lawmakers Tuesday, he sounded a cautionary note.

"Frankly, we have limited options," the Ohio Republican said.

There's no doubt we're in a box here. We're not going to shut down the government again. No one wants us to do that. - Rep. Adam Kinzinger (R-Ill.)

Democrats in Congress could provide Republican leaders with the help they need for passage.

On Tuesday they softened their opposition to Boehner's plan, which has been nicknamed the "cromnibus" — a hybrid of the short-term continuing resolution, or CR, that would be used to fund immigration accounts until early next year, and the broader omnibus spending package to fund the rest of the government through Sept. 30.

If enough Democrats agree to vote for the plan, Boehner could win passage even if he loses several dozen Republicans demanding a tougher approach. A similar calculus is at play in the Senate.

Rep. Steny H. Hoyer (D-Md.), the Democratic whip, signaled an opening Tuesday, saying he was not prepared to make a "hard no or a hard yes on that at this point."

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Rank-and-file Republicans were mixed on the options. Some of the most conservative Republicans still want to use the government funding bill to attempt to block implementation of the president's plan, even if it risks another shutdown. Some counterparts in the Senate are urging them on.

"The weight is on their shoulders to act," said Sen. David Vitter (R-La.). "A funding bill that blocks amnesty is the best, smartest way to do this."

"I don't think you fund any unconstitutional action, even if it's for a short period of time," said veteran Rep. Joe Barton (R-Texas). Others took a more practical approach, warning that the party should not be considering a shutdown as it is about to ascend to the Senate majority.

"There's no doubt we're in a box here," said Rep. Adam Kinzinger (R-Ill.). "We're not going to shut down the government again. No one wants us to do that."

Sen. Harry Reid (D-Nev.), the outgoing majority leader, urged Republicans to come to an agreement. "This is a gentle reminder: In nine days the government runs out of money," he said. "No one wants the kind of cliffhanger fights we've had again and again in recent years."

Meanwhile, Republican critics at Tuesday's hearing called Obama's move on immigration a breach of the Constitution that would encourage more people to cross the border illegally.

"Our immigration system is broken and we need to fix it," said Homeland Security Committee Chairman Michael McCaul (R-Texas). "There's a right way to do this and a wrong way, and unfortunately the president has chosen the wrong way."

Johnson told McCaul's committee he was confident that the immigration action last month was well within the president's legal authority, and he said the president had waited long enough for Congress to act. The Senate passed a bipartisan immigration overhaul in 2013, but it stalled in the House.

"We want people to be accountable — to come out of the shadows," the Homeland Security chief said. "We have lots of undocumented [people] in this country working off the books, and if that's not apparent, then I suggest you spend some time in a restaurant here in the Washington, D.C., area — see it for yourself."

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